Crow gets chance to work with Idol

For most people, 22 years is much too long to wait. Twenty-two minutes usually will suffice.

But in the case of rookie Sportsman driver Rick Crow of Canyon Country, the timing has been just right.

It's been 22 years since Crow was introduced to Saugus Speedway on the night he and his father first spent a Saturday night in the stands at the ½ -mile oval.

It was during the same stretch that the 1980 Saugus High graduate developed an adoration for one driver in particular — Canyon Country resident Jimmy Insolo.

"I used to go out to the races with my dad and I'd always watch him race," said Crow of Insolo, who captured the Sportsman points title in 1968. "He wouldn't take people out. He'd pass people cleanly. My dad used to always say, 'See, that's the way to race.' So that was the guy I'd always watch. I always rooted for him."

Now, following a strange set of circumstances, Crow has received a golden opportunity to work with his childhood idol as part of Saturday's '59 to '89 Reunion Race at Saugus Speedway.

"The best part of it will be seeing all the guys like (Dern) Prosser, (Bill) Foster and (Ron) Hornaday (Sr.) who used to race years ago," said Insolo, who will race Crow's Sportsman car in the Reunion race Saturday. "Another big reason (to be selected) is my car was always No. 38 and I'm going to drive 38. And Prosser's going to drive (No.) 15 and he used to drive 15. It makes it seem even more like old times."

The reunion race, which will follow the Hobby Stock figure 8 main event, will also feature former track champions Walt Price (1962), Prosser (1964, 1969-72), Hornaday Sr. (1965), Mike Fortier (1973, 1975), Don Noel (1976), Tru Cheek (1979, 1981), Roman Calczynski (1983), Ken Sapper (1984-86) and Ron Hornaday Jr. (1987), along with a host of other former Saugus drivers.

"It's like really neat that it all came together," said Crow, of his chance to work with Insolo. "I never thought this would ever happen.

"I mean, I used to run down into the pits to get this guy's autograph. Every night, I must have had 100,000 autographs. Even my first race car I bought, I had to have No. 38 on it."

The two races, along with 1986 Sportsman champion Mike Ayers, have worked through the night this week in preparation for Saturday night's race action.

"He's setting it up for the old-timers style, I think," joked Crow.

"No, really, we kind of talked about, at this point, I don't know how to drive one of these (Sportsman cars). So we figure if we let him set it up, it'll be right. With the experience he has, it has to be right. And I'll just learn how to drive it that way."

Crow, the Hobby Stock rookie of the year in 1988, has raced just four races in that car after moving to the Sportsman class from Street Stock last year.

"My goal is to go (to the NASCAR West) tour and I wanted to move up quick," Crow said. "I had a good year last year (he finished eighth) in street stock and I just don't see the purpose in going back. I mean, I had the track record, I won main events ... With this (racing Sportsman), literally I'm racing against guys I grew up watching."

The scenario is all the more fantastic considering Crow opened the season with a different car and a different owner.

Crow bought the No. 93 Sportsman car from Canyon Country's Steve Burdett, who was driving Sportsman car No. 38 (owned by Richard Johnson), last season. He later sold it to Jim and Stevie Thorne, but still drove it in the car's initial race of the season, July 7.

Despite a fifth-place finish, Burdett quit Johnson's team and hooked up with the Thornes, who reunited him with car No. 93, a car built by Steve's father 12 years earlier. Johnson then hired Crow to drive No. 38.

"His dad built that car and there's a lot of sentimental value in that car," Johnson said. "He's never been the same since he sold that car last year, I sincerely believe that. To me, Steve needed to be in his old car. He was always trying to set this one up like the old one.

"It just didn't work out. I mean we're still friends. It was just that as an owner and a driver we didn't click."

Burdett added, "I just felt too much pressure. We had this brand new, top-of-the-line car, and I felt like everybody was watching everything I did.

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